

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 PM-03 DODE-00 CIAE-00 INR-10

NSAE-00 RSC-01 NSC-10 NSCE-00 L-02 H-01 PRS-01 USIA-04

DRC-01 /058 W

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R 052030Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5609

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

USCINCSO

S E C R E T TEGUCIGALPA 4159

LIMDIS

USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, HO, NU

SUBJECT: CURRENT STATUS OF GOVERNMENT

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 4123 AND 4158

SUMMARY: RUMORS OF CHANGES IN GOH ARE AGAIN CIRCULATING, PROBABLY AS INEVITABLE PRELIMINARY TO FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF MILITARY GOVERNMENT ON DEC 4. EMBASSY DISCOUNTS FOR LACK OF ANY PRESENT EVIDENCE PREDICITIONS OF ANY DRASTIC CHANGES IN FORMAT ON GOALS OF GOH AT THIS TIME. END SUMMARY.

1. IN HIS TALK OF OCT 20 WITH PRES SOMOZA, GEN LOPEZ INDICATED HE WANTED TO SOLIDIFY HIS BASE OF SUPPORT BY REASSOCIATING THE NATIONALIST PARTY WITH THE GOVERNMENT. AS A PRELIMINARY, HE INDICATED HE WOULD

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SOON START TO DEPOSE ZUNIGA AND CLEANSE THE PARTY

(MANAGUA 4212 NOTAL). IT IS PERFECTLY IN LOPEZ' POWER TO DO THIS, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE REASONS WHY IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO DO QUICKLY. WE ACCORDINGLY ARE INCLINED TO THINK THAT THIS WOULD BE A LONG-RATHER THAN SHORT-TERM GOAL. EMBASSY WILL ADDRESS SUBJECT IN SEPTEL.

2. MEANWHILE, THERE HAS AGAIN OCCURRED ANOTHER TYPICAL ACCUMULATION OF RUMORS ABOUT CHANGES IN THE GOVERNMENT WHICH IT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO SUMMARIZE:

3. GEN LOPEZ WILL RETIRE ON DEC 4 AND WILL BE REPLACED BY COL MELGAR. THIS IS REPORTEDLY BEING SPREAD BY CHIEF OF SUPREME COURT ROBERTO RAMIREZ. RAMIREZ ORIGINATED SAME RUMOR IN MARCH WHICH WAS WIDELY CIRCULATED BY CENTRAL AMERICAN BANK SOURCES (TEGUCIGALPA 2286), PARA 3). RAMIREZ WAS FORMERLY CLOSE CONFIDANT OF LOPEZ, BUT WE THINK THIS GOSSIP MORE LIKELY REFLECTS LONGSTANDING FALLING OUT WITH LOPEZ AND SEVERAL OF NEW MINISTERS OVER AGRARIAN DECREE NO. 8, WHICH RAMIREZ OPPOSES. CURRENT RUMOR IS NEUTRAL ON WHETHER MELGAR WOULD BE REPLACING LOPEZ AS RIVAL OR AS CHOSEN SUCCESSOR.

4. MELGAR WILL BECOME CHIEF OF ARMED FORCES. AT LEAST THIS RUMOR ACCORDS MORE CLOSELY TO OUR CONCEPT THAT MELGAR IS LOYAL TO LOPEZ' COMMANDS. WE THINK THAT LOPEZ IDEALLY WOULD LIKE TO RETURN TO HIS PRE-1971 SITUATION WHEN HE SERVED ONLY AS PRESIDENT. HIS PROBLEM IS THAT IT MIGHT BE DIFFICULT TO RETURN COL RAMIREZ ORTEGA TO POSITION OF CHIEF OF ARMED FORCES, SINCE LATTER HAS HAD NEITHER COMMAND NOR STAFF POSITIONS SINCE 1971. AND SELECTION OF MELGAR, OR ANY OF FOUR OR FIVE COLONELS OF HIS STATURE, WOULD ALMOST BE TAKEN BY RIVALS AS AN ANOINTMENT OF SUCCESSION, AND THIS COULD BE CONTROVERSIAL.

5. THERE WILL BE CABINET CHANGES. IT WOULD BE NATURAL IF LOPEZ CHANGED SOME OF HIS MINISTERS AFTER FIRST-YEAR SHAKEDOWN OF GOVERNMENT, AND INDEED AT OUTSET HE SAID HE WOULD REPLACE NON-PERFORMERS. AS AGAINST THIS IS
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LOPEZ' EXTRAORDINARY CONSERVATISM IN SHIFTING CIVIL PERSONNEL, WHICH MANIFESTED ITSELF IN PRACTICALLY NO FIRING OF MINISTERS IN HIS ENTIRE 1963-71 PERIOD OF GOVERNMENT. CRITICISM (MAINLY FROM BUSINESS AND NATIONALIST PARTY CIRCLES) FOCUSSED ON MINLAB FONSECA AND MINFIN ACOSTA IN EARLY 1973 HAS NOW ATTENUATED. NEW TARGETS ARE MINCOMMUNICATIONS RIVERA, WHO IS CHARGED WITH INCOMPETENCE AND DISHONESTY OF SUBORDINATES,

AND MINECON BENNATON, WHOM BUSINESS COMMUNITY REGARDS AS IMPRACTICAL AND INACCESSIBLE. CHIEF OF PLANNING MARTINEZ HAS ALSO RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE CRITICISM AMONG FELLOW MINISTERS AS WANTING IN COOPERATIVENESS. OUR GUESS IS THAT RIVERA IS MOST VULNERABLE, AS HE IS OUTSIDER TO CORE CLIQUE WHICH SETS TONE OF GOVERNMENT.

6. MILITARY INFORM US THAT CONSIDERABLE ROUND OF COMMAND CHANGES WILL NOW FOLLOW AND COMPLEMENT RECENT RETIREMENTS AND PROMOTIONS. COMMANDERS MUST NOW FOR INSTANCE BE APPOINTED TO FIRST (CHOLUTUCA) AND SEVENTH (LA CEIBA) ZONES. IN SENSE, THIS CONTINUES BROADER REORGANIZATION OF ARMED FORCES BEGUN IN MID-YEAR, AND IN SUCH PROCESS THERE ARE BOUND TO BE LOSERS. RUMORS THUS PROLIFERATE AND ARE LIKELY TO MULTIPLY UNTIL COMMAND CHANGES ARE FINISHED AND GOH PRESENTS, OR FAILS TO PRESENT, IT PROMISED FIVE-YEAR PLAN ON DEC 4.

7. IN GENERAL, WE SEE NO EVIDENCE OF SERIOUS DISARRAY OR INSTABILITY WITHIN GOH, NOR ANY CONSTELLATION OF FORCES WHICH PRESENTLY CAN SERIOUSLY CHALLENGE IT. ACCORDING TO GEN LOPEZ' RECENT COMMENTS TO AMBASSADOR, WE THINK THAT HE WILL CONTINUE PRETTY MUCH ON ANNOUNCED COURSE. LOPEZ ALSO STRONGLY DEFENDED HIS CABINET IN RARE INTERVIEW WITH CRONISTA ON NOV 5 (TEGUCIGALPA 4158). WE SEE NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ANY CHANGES OF MAGNITUDE WHICH WOULD ALTER CURRENT GOH PRIORITIES OR FAVORABLE BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH USG.
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